

Subj: your book  
Date: 9/4/2002 6:24:35 PM Pacific Daylight Time  
From: Frances Fitzgerald  
To:

Dear

Many thanks for the book. It is just wonderful

First and foremost, it's beautifully written. It's as tight, well-focused – full of suspense. Your "I" character right on target: not too much, not too little. So, while we're interested in you, we feel we might have been there and done some of that ourselves. (In this age of narcissism few writers achieve this kind of balance and transparency – and there's a real art to getting it right.)

The first chapters on the Pentagon have just enough explanation of what it is like to work there – but not too much. The same goes for the Vietnam section. I'm not the average reader of that section, so of course I would have liked more. But for the average reader I thought you did it just right: kiss off the bureaucratic politics and get into the field. And you do marvelous combat reporting – we are there in the paddies with you.

Secondly, I think you were entirely right to concentrate the first (Pentagon and Vietnam) sections on the doubters and the opponents of the war within the administration. I don't know how much you add to the factual record (I haven't followed this literature in a long time) but the real dark, dirty secret of the war was that no one in high places – except fools – believed it could be won on terms acceptable to the American public. You, of course, have written this before, and others have spoken of it, but I don't think the case has ever been made as powerfully as you have made it here. The "eyes only" McNaughton file and the remark Komer made to you just floored me.

The Bobby Kennedy – and Kennedy decision-making – section is fascinating. (You told us the general idea in your essay, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," but you make the point even more effectively in this narrative format.)

Fascinating, too is the chapter on the 206,000 additional troops. (I read somewhere, or someone told me, that Wheeler wanted most of those troops to fill in the depleted ranks in Europe and elsewhere. Is this not true? Clearly Westy did want to go into Cambodia and Laos to "cut" the trail, but North Vietnam as well? I always thought Johnson was really scared the Chinese would intervene – but perhaps this is another matter.) So interested to know that the leak of the 206,000 figure was what led you to think of leaking. Do you really not know who the leaker was?

Then on to Kissinger and Nixon. (There's never a dull moment.) Apropos of Kissinger, another really good thing about the book is that you don't attack anyone personally. (Though there's a great anecdote from Mathias about Nixon coming down to dinner to meet him and his wife with the band playing Hail to the Chief!)

I like the way you describe your own – very logical – move from being against the escalation of the war to being against the war period. Very convincingly written, this part.

Apropos of Nixon's war, I wish you had explained how Nixon could bomb Cambodia and Laos without it becoming public knowledge. The American press was lazy about following up the Beecher story. Still, such a thing couldn't happen today, and I really don't know how it happened then. Did the DRV not report it? Did the press pay no attention to the North Vietnamese claims? Were there no complaints from Cambodia? Etc.

I don't remember – if I ever knew it – that Sheehan copied the PPs without telling you. Riveting. I also didn't know about all the senators you offered the PPs to in advance. Or that the FBI had talked to your first wife well before you did any of this. This makes your decision to give it to the Times all the more heroic.

I thought the narrative would lose momentum after that, but instead the pace increases. You do a great job with the Nixon tapes, the Egil Krogh testimony and the revelations that came during your trial. What a drama! What a finale!

All the subsequent evidence entirely vindicates what Vann and Halperin told you about Nixon's plan to continue the war as long as he remained in office – whatever that took. And this is the most monstrous secret of all.

Surely the book is going to make the best-seller list, and if you haven't had movie offers already, I'd be surprised. More important (to me at least) is that it's going to make waves – both in terms of the history of Vietnam decision-making and in terms of current events.

Really, it could not be coming out at a better time. I see in the acknowledgements that it's thanks to your son that it is coming out this fall - just when we most need it. You also suggest that he's responsible for the elegant tightness of the book. So do congratulate your remarkable son for me.

Congratulations and best wishes for a huge success.

As ever, Frankie.

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